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October 25, 2023

The Honorable Jared G. Solomon, Chair  
The Honorable Mark M. Gillen, Republican Chair  
Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee on Security & Emergency Response  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Harrisburg, PA

Re: Informational meeting on Battling Cancer and Other Occupational Diseases

Dear Representatives Solomon and Gillen,

Thank you for holding this informational meeting on battling cancer and other occupational diseases in firefighting and other professions. On behalf of the Fox Chase Cancer Center, I write to express our highest level of support for the development of an optimal screening and educational plan to help protect the firefighters from their occupational risk for cancer.

Please know that we at Fox Chase are very committed to this effort. In fact, our community liaisons - Frank Baxter, Tiffany Fagnani, and Donna Thompson - who are part of our Nuclear Dynamics and Cancer Program (Program) identified this critical need. Therefore, faculty leads in the Program initiated efforts with the liaisons and Charnita Zeigler-Johnson, PhD and Evelyn González, MA of our Community Outreach and Engagement Office (COE) to help address screening, education, and healthcare coverage. Together we invested funds to help generate a questionnaire from the perspective of the firefighters to help understand what is needed to better educate on safety and screening. This questionnaire is being coupled to the scientific strength of our Program members to look at how DNA and the inherited structure in cells are being impacted by exposure during firefighting. These efforts are an example of integrated community involvement.

There is an unmet need to reduce the cancer burden on the firefighters and others with occupational exposure. Therefore, any efforts or legislation that will reduce this burden to the individual, their families and community is ideal. These efforts are very timely and will have a profound impact on lives in Pennsylvania and beyond. The efforts by our team are in line with the Committee's consideration of mechanisms to increase health insurance coverage and timely screening for any firefighters in the state; an identified concern of first responders. Lung cancer, bladder cancer and many other cancers are increased in firefighters, which is something we should address. Proper education and coverage for screening will inevitably save lives and decrease the burden to individuals putting their life on the line for our community. We hope that the committee will endorse efforts to educate, protect and screen.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Chernoff, MD, PhD  
Director, Fox Chase Cancer Center